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## OFFERING, SACRIFICE AND GIFT

BY

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In this paper <sup>1)</sup> I call an offering any act of presenting something to a supernatural being, a sacrifice an offering accompanied by the ritual killing of the object of the offering. This definition does not permit the use of the term sacrifice for killing rituals (a term introduced by Jensen, 1951) that are neither preceded nor followed by the presentation of the object of the rite to a supernatural being.

Among the distinctive features of offering and sacrifice I do not include their sacred nature, considered to be their most essential characteristic by Hubert and Mauss, the authors of the *Essai sur la Nature et la Fonction sociale du Sacrifice* (1899). Founding their argument on data derived from Hebrew and Vedic sources, they concluded that the confrontation with the sacred is the awe-inspiring heart and core of the sacrificial act. However, the authors of these sources were native theologians, representing the views held by a priestly elite caste in a fairly highly developed society. Modern ethnographic research in simpler societies gives evidence that here the victims of a sacrifice are relatively rarely held to be sacred. Under certain circumstances they may, indeed, be tabooed but the rule is that these victims are primarily appreciated as meat. Even the parts more specifically dedicated to the gods are so little sacred that sometimes the children are condoned to snatch up the (mostly small) portions set aside for divine use. The sacred nature of the victim is too accidental a feature to be used as the foundation for the construction of a theory on the origin and development of sacrifice. To that end we have to turn to that general characteristic that sacrifice and offering have in common, that of being gifts. It is all the more desirable to concentrate on this common feature

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<sup>1)</sup> Originally read at the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Int. Association for the History of Religions, Lancaster, August 1975.

because a sacrifice is not necessarily a more deeply religious ceremony than an offering. Some of the really elaborate East Indonesian sacrifices are more typically social than religious affairs as is well borne out by their markedly potlatch-like character. Reversely, an offering can be a highly impressive religious ceremony without including a sacrifice. Quite a variety of Balinese temple feasts do not include any form of ritual killing, the decorated dishes (the meat included) being prepared at home, afterwards to be carried by the assembled villagers in a colourful ceremonial procession to the temple where they devoutly place the offerings at the foot of one of the shrines, to be dedicated by the priest who, on a raised platform, says his prayers and *mantras* and rings his bell. Of course, the combination of the rite with a killing ceremony may add to the grandeur of the event but, when all is said and done, the possibility to stage such a killing ceremony is not primarily a matter of greater religious devotion, but of wealth, a form of ceremony that only livestock-breeding peoples can afford. Apart from human beings the only animals that let themselves be sacrificed, i.e. killed on the spot chosen for the celebration, are domestic animals. The ritual killing of game is necessarily restricted to very exceptional circumstances and occasions.

The problem is whether this emphasis on the gift-character of offering and sacrifice can help us anyway better to understand their meaning. It has been tried before with decidedly poor results, such as the interpretation of offerings as implements in a cunning game of *do-ut-des* with deities and ancestors dull enough to let themselves occasionally be cheated by the presentation of small titbits, or even of symbolic gifts such as that of a chicken for a real bull. However, such interpretations do not derive from undue stress on the fact that offerings are gifts, but from a fundamental misconception of the proper nature of the gift.

The confusion started with Tylor's definition of sacrifice (to him synonymous with offering): "As prayer is a request made to a deity as if we here a man, so sacrifice is a gift made to a deity as if he were a man. The human types of both may be studied unchanged in social life to this day. The suppliant who bows before his chief, laying a gift at his feet and making his humble petition, displays the anthropomorphic model and origin at once of sacrifice and prayer" (1871 II p. 375). The metaphor is thoroughly misleading, as appears when

Tylor's human types are transposed to more modern conditions. The suppliant then changes into the petitioner standing, not before a chief, but before the window-countre of the licence-office, underhand pushing a banknote across the desk to the clerk whom he wishes to hand him the licence he desires. Tylor's human types did not offer a gift, but a bribe. His *do-ut-des* theory of sacrifice is its necessary consequence. The bribe is given to induce the deities to go out of their way to meet the 'suppliant's' desires. To ensure this the offering must be substantial, and if it is not (as in the case of a titbit or a symbolic offering) Tylor accuses the sacrificer of cheating. Of course he does; having founded his notions of gift and sacrifice on corruption, he has to persist to the very end.

Tylor's theory of sacrifice has been rejected (and rightly so) on the ground that it is incompatible with the spirit and meaning of religion. Unfortunately, Tylor's adversaries did not find fault with Tylor's notion of the gift but with the gift as such. Even the appearance in 1924 of Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le Don* failed to lead to more than at best a partial reappraisal of the gift as the founding notion of offering and sacrifice. Typical in this respect is the position taken by Van der Leeuw in his *Phaenomenologie der Religion* (§ 50). Admitting that an offering is a gift, he emphasizes the 'magical' effect of the gift and thus succeeds in combining some aspects of the gift as described by Mauss with old concepts borrowed from the *do-ut-des* theory and more recent notions stressing the magical and mystical implications of sacrifice and offering. The theory is too much a mixture of everything to be convincing, but we cannot blame Van der Leeuw for stressing the magical aspects. It was Mauss himself who had kept him on this track.

The problem underlying the *Essai sur le Don* is the Durkheimian problem of the origin of the moral obligation faithfully to fulfil one's part in a contractual agreement. Historically the gift is older than the contract from which it differs primarily by the absence of any explicit agreement stipulating the nature, time or form of the return gift. Gift and return gift are not the free and voluntary acts they seem to be. There are no really free gifts. The analysis undertaken by Mauss disclosed that the gift involves three distinct obligations, those to give, to accept (one cannot refuse a gift) and to reciprocate. The obligation to reciprocate, the gift has in common with the contract, and it is to

this aspect of the gift that Mauss paid specific attention. Why reciprocity? Although he did not formulate a comprehensive theory (the *Essai* is primarily a phenomenological description and analysis) he did make a few suggestions, the most important among them being that something pertaining to the personality of the giver adheres to the object given away as a present, inducing the receiver to give something in return. A case in point is the Maori belief that a sizable gift has a *hau*, a kind of mana, compelling the donee to reciprocate lest the *hau* make him fall ill and die (Mauss 1950 pp. 158 f.).

It is evident that this Maori belief simply reflects the compulsive power of the obligation as experienced by a Maori. It is a secondary interpretation of the obligation without any explanatory value because reciprocity is as strictly mandatory where such beliefs are unknown (cf. also Cl. Lévi-Strauss in Mauss 1950 p. XXXIX). To Van der Leeuw, however, the belief was precisely what suited his own preferences for 'magical' explanations and encouraged him to apply them in his theory of sacrifice.

Mauss had still another problem, one that he did not solve but that he analyzed beautifully. The reciprocity of the gift is anything but mechanical. It is deeply affected by status differences between exchange partners. The superior gives more than the inferior. A man of low status who gives lavishly is braggish, a rich man who fails in magnificence is mean. Therefore the return gift of the man of low status is small, of a man of high status big. This has important implications on the practice of sacrifice and offering. The sacrificer is by definition always the lesser of the deities whom he offers his gift. His offering is, naturally, small, and Mauss dryly remarks: "Car ces dieux qui donnent et rendent sont là pour donner une grande chose à la place d'une petite" (1950 p. 169). Mauss did not comment any further on matters of sacrifice and so his remark did not get the attention it deserves. Yet, it once and for all disproved Tylor's disdainful comments on small offerings. Offerings are small naturally, and the real problem of sacrifice is not the small but the big offering. We shall have to return to this later; for the moment our concern is primarily with the absence of a theory explaining the characteristics of the gift. Mauss raised the problems without solving them.

A major problem of the gift is that of the inconsistencies of its reciprocity. Reciprocity itself had been recognized as a principle of

universal significance even before Mauss. Malinowski expounded its importance for all forms of exchange in his *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* in 1922. In 1926 he gave further substance to the thesis that reciprocity is a principle of universal validity by applying it to the rules of civil and penal law (*Crime and Custom in Savage Society*). Later (1949) Lévi-Strauss called reciprocity one of the fundamental structures of the human mind (1967 p. 98), a principle always and everywhere spontaneously recognized and applied in social institutions. Yet, the stronger the stress on reciprocity as a principle of universal validity, the more urgent the problems created by deviating institutions and customs. An absorbing discussion of the ins and outs of disbalanced reciprocity was presented by Marshall Sahlins in his essay *On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange* (1965). It is not only that reciprocity is sometimes unbalanced as in gift-exchange between partners of unequal status, but reciprocity can also be muddled, unclear, a principle held in latency as a weapon in reserve against persons who fail to comply with reasonable expectations. Muddled reciprocity prevails in the give-and-take characterizing the interaction between members of the small group. Here every member contributes to capacity, the strong and the clever producing the bulk of the group's material necessities, whereas the weak and the infirm have little more to offer than their good intentions. Up to an extent the relation is of a similar nature as that between high-status and low-status givers, but it differs in that it is perfectly informal. However, though reciprocity is not explicitly mentioned, it is not forgotten. It is implicit. When a member fails to cooperate to the degree he is expected to do, he will immediately be reminded of the rule of reciprocity and its implications.

I shall not enter into a discussion of the theoretical explanations forwarded by Sahlins and others. A major weakness of all of them is the lack of distinction between the diverging forms of exchange, an astonishing omission because some of the differences are so obvious. To give an example: the reciprocity obligatory in gift-exchange is not protected by law, but the obligations incurred in contracts and trade agreements are. Or another example: a gift must be accepted but a commercial offer not. Considerations of this kind induced me to a renewed review of the relevant facts by grouping them into two pairs of opposites, *viz.* gift-exchange versus trade, and punishment versus revenge, the latter in connection with reciprocity in succ. penal and

civil law. The results concerning gift-exchange and trade I summarized in the following table (from Van Baal 1975 p. 50):

TRADE	GIFT-EXCHANGE
Traders functionally each other's equals	Participants not always equals
Social relations weak, exhausted by completed exchange	Social relations strong, strengthened by completed exchange
Aims at the other one's goods	Aims at the other one's person
Goods exchanged often lowly valued	Goods exchanged often highly valued
Strict reciprocity, balanced	Reciprocity not always balanced
No obligation to trade or to accept an offer	Obligation to give and to accept a gift
Contracts (trade-relations) protected by law	Gift-exchange not protected by law
Trade does not bind participants	Gifts bind, turn participants into partners

With regard to punishment and revenge I note that both involve a harm inflicted on the wrongdoer, but inflicted for radically different purposes. A punishment aims at restoring the delinquent to his proper place in the group by his atonement and his acceptance of the harm delivered to him. To the contrary revenge sees at the personal satisfaction and the restoration of the damaged status of the delinquent's victim by the severance and denial of social ties between the parties concerned. Punishment and revenge have in common that they normally are incommensurate to the crime but they are this in different ways. In punishment reciprocity tends to be muddled, less severe than a strict balance requires. In revenge it is clearly disbalanced. A thrashing must be repaid with a superior return-gift of blows to restore the initial victim's status.<sup>2)</sup> In general, revenge sees at the elimination of the delinquent, punishment at his person and its salvation for society. This is why, in penal law-suits, the administering of justice tends to be characterized by muddled reciprocity, whereas in the settlement of civil law-suits dealing with goods and material interests, reciprocity is carefully balanced. The parallelism (mostly a parallelism in reverse) between these differences and some of those between gift-exchange and trade, is striking.

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2) A special form of revenge is capital punishment. Formally it is not a punishment because it does not begin with its execution, but ends with it. And materially it aims at the convict's elimination from society (cf. Van Baal 1975 pp. 58 ff.).

The principal difference between the two categories of exchange of goods is that in gift-exchange participants aim at the other one's person, in trade at the other one's goods. The gift holds a message to the donee, that of 'I, donor, regard you as a partner, appreciate you as a friend, as one who belongs to us.' The gift transfers this message not with empty words but with the unshakable factuality of its material presence. Thus the gift is an answer to the fundamental problem of the human condition, that of man's uncertainty about himself as a part of his universe from which, as a subject, he differs and is perennially separate.

In *Symbols for communication* I argued that the dialectics of the human condition, the combination of being a part and yet a subject, a subject and yet a part of one's universe, make communication an urgent necessity, a communication however, that is not merely an exchange of messages, but a communication which implies that whole world of feeling that conveys the comforting awareness of the reality of one's participation and 'Zuhausesein', being at home, in one's universe. I shall not repeat the argument and confine myself to stating that the gift has the power to persuade a homesick waif or a suspicious soul that he is counted in, that he belongs to the group. Who could refuse a gift or fail to reciprocate? The gift is a godsend.

In all this there is no magic at all and yet it explains a lot. It even explains why the gift can be misused and taken advantage of for selfish purposes. The gift is an attractive and persuasive form for establishing contacts and ameliorating relations. It can be used to persuade a donee to do things he would not think of doing otherwise. We then speak of a bribe. Another misuse is the distribution of gifts as a means to enhance one's status, a possibility exploited in the Kwakiutl potlatch to such an extreme that in some cases gift-giving is turned into a form of controlled warfare instead of a friendly game. All this should not divert us from appreciating what and how a gift really is.

The gift is directed at the other one's person. Consequently, the latter's status and accidental circumstances must be taken account of. The gifts presented to a man in mourning differ from those given to a bridegroom. The gift must be adapted to social conditions. When there is a feast or a public crisis ostentatious giving is called for, but when things are running smoothly, as usually is the case in the small



group that is a closely knit unit, it takes the unobtrusive form of a purely informal give-and-take with no other book-keeping of everyone's contributions than the sincerity of his intentions. It is the intentions that count in actions directed at the other one's person.

The many forms of offering and sacrifice could, like those of the gift, be grouped in ostentatious and unobtrusive forms. More meaningful, however, is a classification according to differences in religious situation by discerning between low-intensity and high-intensity rites. I owe the use of this distinction to the courtesy of Mr. J. G. Platvoet of the Theological Faculty of Utrecht University who introduced it in an inedited paper in which he opposed low-intensity communication to high-intensity communication. Low-intensity communication, he argued, is the ideal form for man's relations with the supernatural. When things run smoothly and anxiety is absent, simple rites suffice to keep up good relations with the gods, inspiring confidence in the persistence of their benevolence and protection. To the contrary, when misfortune or disaster persuade the faithful that there is something wrong with these relations, other rites are called for, those of the high-intensity type.

The opposition as introduced by Mr. Platvoet is, of course, not an absolute one, but it certainly is meaningful. It paves the way to due attention to what is so often neglected in our discipline, the religious practice of the simple faithful who is just pious without problems or fuss. One might call it routine piety provided it be understood that this routine is a mark of its sincerity. It is not a mean thing that, in some cultures, in every household on every day a minuscule gift of food is set aside on the simple house-shrine dedicated to the ancestors. Elsewhere such customs are restricted to special occasions like festive meals or the first dish of the beans or corn of the new harvest. When beer has been brewed a few drops are spilled or a small gourd is set aside under thanksgiving. The offerer does not mind who ultimately eats or drinks his offering. What counts is that he expresses his faith in the nearness of his gods and ancestors who, because of this nearness, must be remembered as co-residents of the compound. Our western culture is a word-culture. Accordingly the material sharing of food has been reduced to the thanksgiving of saying grace. Yet, it serves the same purpose, the inner realization of the Lord's comforting

presence. The impact of a food offering is best illustrated by a remarkable custom of an Australian people, the Murngin, as little given to praying and offering as any Australian tribe. Celebrating their rites for the dead, they publicly take a meal of which nothing is set aside for the deceased with the explicit aim that his spirit will understand that he does no longer belong to the circle of the living and has to leave (Warner 1957 p. 417). Sharing food is communicating.

Among the low-intensity rites we must include the sacrifices and offerings made on the occasion of ostentatious, potlatch-like celebrations like those for the inauguration of a new subclan or the commemoration of a deceased chief in East Indonesia. When the Ngad'a of Flores celebrate such a feast scores of buffaloes are slaughtered after having been presented ceremonially to the gods (for a summary see Van Baal 1971 pp. 250-258). It is a great social event because all the meat must be distributed among the numerous guests, the share allotted to the gods and ancestors being really minimal, a detail rationalized on the eastern part of the island by stating that what little is to us, is much to the gods and reversely (Arndt 1951 pp. 2, 18, 106). The guests display greater interest in the distribution of the meat than in the religious part of the ceremony. Yet, the ancestors are not really ignored. Actually, they participate in every aspect of Ngad'a life. They all have their sanctuaries in the village, where the dead are buried in the stone walls separating the terraces on which, in these mountain-villages, the houses are built. Every house has its special niches where the forefathers of the inmates abide and where they receive small food offerings every time there is a festive dish. These small offerings are brought without any ceremonial. We even do not know whether the bringer of the food addresses the ancestors or that he just puts the food down at the intended place. But an official ceremony like an inauguration calls for an official invocation. One of the interesting features of such an invocation is the emphasis on the desirability of the presence, the nearness even, of gods and ancestors. They are invited to descend to accept the beasts that shall be sacrificed in their honour, but also to sit on their people's shoulders and necks and to protect them like a stone wall against disaster and sickness.

The address to the gods invariably includes a prayer for health, prosperity and a long life. Although such prayers are common enough, the combination with an offering should surprise us for the simple

reason that it is bad form for the donor of a gift to request anything in return, let alone to specify his desires. This deviation from the ordinary pattern of gift-giving is all the more conspicuous because on a feast of this size and magnificence there is not the slightest reason to pray for prosperity. The whole feast is a demonstration of the feast-giver's undoubted prosperity. If ever there is a wrong moment to ask for it, it is on this day of abundance. And yet they pray for it as well as for many other things about which the assembled merry-makers do not visibly worry. What makes it all the more interesting is that this is not a specifically Ngad'a ideosyncrasy: sacrifices are attended by prayers everywhere, whether there is reason for praying or not. An interesting parallel is presented by the custom of Protestant Christians to say grace before meals. Though dimly aware that a thanksgiving is a poor occasion for asking favours, they strongly feel that irrespective of all rational considerations something ought to be requested anyhow. They decide to ask for a blessing. Nobody knows exactly what this stands for, and this apparently makes it easier to pray for it.

The irrationality of the usage cautions us not to look for its basic motivations in the aims overtly and consciously pursued, i.e. in the things prayed for, but in the structure of the prayer situation as such. It is the address of a man offering something to his god, a discourse between two beings separated by the maximal status difference imaginable. *Vis-à-vis* the almighty humility is called for, not merely in words but in deeds as well. Requesting is both the most simple and the most decisive act of self-humiliation, the recognition at once of the requestant's dependence and of the addressee's power. Confronted to his god, asking is the most effective confession of a man's belief and worship. What cannot be done when offering a gift to a fellow-man, asking for something, must be done when offering a gift to a god. To do otherwise would be braggish. And this is where a gift differs from an offering.

All this is pertinent to low-intensity situations in which the relations between a man and his gods are normal and need nothing more or else than being kept up. Such relations are akin to those prevailing in the small and closely knit group with its continuous give-and-take, where intentions count more and better than the physical contributions made by each member individually. The offerings made in this situation are vehicles of intentions. Everyone knows that, just like

everyone knows that the gods do not really eat the offerings presented to them, but that the mice and the ants do, or, as the case may be, the children. No one minds; the giving is a symbolic act of communication and so is the disappearance of the food a symbol of the participation of the gods and credulously ascribed to their acceptance. It is the symbol that counts. It is all very simple and there is no question of magic. The notion that offering and sacrifice are sacral acts hardly plays a role. Even in Hebrew religion, where the holiness of the Lord and everything pertaining to him is so strongly emphasized in the priestly precepts, the sacrifices of which the main part goes to the sacrificer are less sacred than the others. Some of them (the offering for a vow and the voluntary offering mentioned in Lev. 7) may even be eaten on the day after the sacrifice, an exceptional latitude in this purity ridden complex of regulations.

The picture changes as soon as situations present themselves requiring action for high-intensity communication: illness, epidemics, calamities or mortal sin. The means applied may include sacrifice and offering, but the *schema* of gift-exchange is affected by other considerations to such an extent that it has to give way to wholly different forms such as those pertinent to penitence and expiation, or to communication with the gods by identification with their mythical activities. The sacrificial rituals that must answer the requirements of high-intensity situations are of such extreme diversity that I must confine myself to a few cases to illustrate my point, beginning with those in which the *schema* of the gift is dominant and then turning to those in which it has lost its relevance.

My first case is that of the payment of vows. Vows are made in prayers sent up by a barren woman desiring a child, by a family for the recovery of a sick father or son, by a dismissed official for a new job, etc. If the prayer is heard a sacrifice shall be brought at a certain sanctuary on the day appointed for such occasions. The procedure followed at the sanctuary is a perfectly normal one. The beast is presented to the deity whom thanks are brought for his benevolence. Then the victim is slaughtered, the meat divided among the guests, and a small portion set aside for the deity if this is thought to be proper at all (it can fail to turn up, for example, if the blood flowing away is regarded as the divine share). The celebration is a feast where gratitude and merriness prevail. Yet, it is also a payment. Vows must

be paid and woe befalls him who fails to do so. But it is a payment of a peculiar nature. Although the vow resembles a condition in a contract, it differs from a contractual condition in that it does not oblige the other party to the deliverance of any good, but only the maker of the vow. The deity remains perfectly free to hear or not to hear the suppliant. The latter binds only himself. The stage set by the vow is that the fulfilment of the prayer shall be seen as a gift, a completely free gift of the deity. If that gift be made then, of course, the beneficiary owes a counter-gift, the counter-gift stipulated in the vow. The reciprocity of the gift is binding. That the whole procedure is defined by the *schema* of the gift is confirmed by the fact that feelings of gratitude define the spiritual atmosphere of the celebration.

A more or less comparable case is that of the sacrifice brought for a sick man whose illness is ascribed to the wrath of neglected ancestors who did not receive all the sacrifices that a wise man should make on their behalf. The ancestors are nearby, often even inmates of the house, and the rules of the gift imply the obligation to give, primarily to those who are kinsmen. The negligence of the obligation has to be made good by a bigger gift than usual. The *do-ut-des* of the transaction that must lead to the patient's recovery is not contrary to the *schema* of the gift anyway. The same holds true of sacrifices brought for the reconciliation of injuries committed against living persons, injuries discovered since the delinquent fell ill. Reparations are made and social bonds restored. Payments, indeed, but payments made in the form of gifts with deities or ancestors as the ever present participants in the celebration. Again, the prevalence of the *schema* of the gift is evident. It is confirmed by the fact that the victim of the sacrifice is cut up and the meat distributed among those present, as usual. It is neither sacred nor taboo.

A sacrifice for the expiation of mortal sin is completely different. The relevant procedure has been elaborately discussed by Hubert and Mauss. The scene is well-known: the sinner puts his hand on the victim's back to express his intrinsic relation with the beast, and then, after the dedication, follows the complete destruction of the animal by fire. The victim is God's, i.e. it is sacred. It is also the bearer of the sacrificer's impurity and sin which are taken away by its destruction. That the victim is the vehicle of the sinner's impurity is highlighted by the sacrifice brought on the Day of Atonement: one goat

is burned, the other brought to the desert and set free. It is the goat for Azazel (Lev. 16 : 10), carrying the people's impurity with it, just like the bird set free for the recovered leper (Lev. 14 : 5 ff.) takes the latter's impurity with it. In both cases the priest explicitly transfers the impurity to the beast by symbolic acts.

Although there is not the slightest doubt that after their consecration the victims, whether burned or set free, are sacred, it is fully justified to doubt the wisdom of stressing this sacredness too much, i.e. beyond its function of being a symbol of the proper meaning of the ritual. In other words, I object against a reification of the symbolic content by interpreting it as a magical act. It is a misjudgement of the fundamental meaning of the expiatory sacrifice as an act of atonement, an act ruled not by magic but by the *schema* of the punishment, namely, a public confession combined with the suffering of a penalty which make the confessor acceptable to return to his place in society and in the normal relationships between gods and men. Earlier in this paper I referred to certain parallels between the *schema* of the gift and that of punishment. They explain why a sacrifice, more often a form of the gift, can be used also as a form of punishment. Because a punishment it is: the public confession of a sin but also the loss of a precious article of wealth that is not used for any good but for destruction, the destruction of its owner's guilt.

Expiatory sacrifices are reported from many parts. In East Indonesia, where holocausts are rare, the Southern Toradja will bring one in case a man has committed incest with his sister or a full cousin. It is a mortal sin that makes the land hot so that prolonged drought must be feared. A buffalo is dedicated to the supreme being by the priest who addresses the god with his face turned westward (the ordinary posture is eastward). The beast is then killed and cut into pieces that are burned. In one part of the area the offender himself must tether the beast and address the god while holding the rope with his hand. The act of atonement and the punishment are clear. Yet, in this case there is more to it than this alone. Just like the sin has cosmic consequences, making the land hot, so has the holocaust. The smoke-clouds that go up from the burning sacrifice will in time turn into rain-clouds that cool the earth.<sup>3)</sup>

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3) I thank Dr. Hetty Nooy-Palm for this information.

Two things are here combined. On the one hand sin, punishment and atonement, and on the other hand the belief that human acts can have cosmic consequences. The belief makes part of a worldview to which the visible things hold a mystery of their own by which they are more than they are or seem to be. Although to the Toradja the supreme being is the ultimate source and ruler of all hidden powers, human beings have a responsibility and power of their own. One may call this magic but I think that mystic knowledge is a better word, doing more justice to the notions of reverence inherently implied, as well as to the fact that this belief refers to another form of communication with the universe, *viz.* that by symbolic identification.

Expiatory sacrifices are not always holocausts. The Nuer of the East African Sudan have other ways to deal with serious cases of incest. An ox, dedicated by a priest, is killed and divided from nose to tail into two halves, one for the priests, the other for the sacrificer and his family who will consume the meat of their half. But the blood is for God and they closely observe that it runs away into the soil because it carries the delinquent's sin with it and makes for complete atonement and purification. Up to an extent the sacrificer is identical with the victim; before it is killed he rubs its back with ashes, expressing their togetherness (Evans-Pritchard 1956 pp. 189, 216, 298). The identification of a man and his ox is a recurrent theme in Nuer culture. In a sacrifice as here discussed it takes mystic dimensions in the identification of the sacrificer's sin with the victim's blood, and in the bisection of the carcass. If one prefers that term, one might call it magic, provided it be recognized that the act is primarily one of punishment and atonement: a public confession of sin and the loss of a highly valued animal, at the very least of the half of it that goes to the priests. That the punishment is not harder than this is because the Nuer do not condemn incest as severely as the Toradja do.

The Nuer celebrate holocausts for other purposes. When there is impending danger of pest or murrain they 'go out to meet it.' They slaughter a number of oxen in the bush where the carcasses are left behind 'as a wall'. The sacrifice is made to God, but the dead beasts are left to the evil spirits of illness. They may not be touched by anyone and the idea seems to be "that the evil has entered them through the sacrificial act" (Evans-Pritchard 1956 p. 220). The magical effect of the rite is obvious; something dedicated to God must stop the

peril. The 'wall' of dead beasts has a power derived from the sacrifice, in part perhaps also from the notion that oxen are so near to man. In fact, this holocaust is a deed of despair. The Nuer are a cattle loving people and nothing but the gravest danger can persuade them to part with their oxen in this manner. It is impossible to classify this holocaust either as a gift or as a penitence. There are some elements of penitence in it, but certainly not of the gift. Yet, if penitence has suggested the form, it still has a distinct character, that of coming to terms with evil spirits who must be propitiated by a desperate act that comes nearer to a bribe than anything.

We noted in passing that cattle are so near to man. As a matter of fact, cattle are extremely inviting vehicles for identification, primarily for identification with man, but also for identification with the gods. Cattle are wealth, the most important item of wealth among many peoples. They are tended with care and devotion. Among cattle breeders strong feelings of togetherness between a man and his beasts prevail. An interesting case is that of the Ngad'a of Flores. They hold the view that *Déva*, the supreme being, herds mankind like the Ngad'a herd their buffaloes. Next to *Déva* there are a host of minor *déva*, particularisations of the great one. Father Arndt noted a statement to the effect that, when the *déva* above kill a buffalo a man dies on earth, and when the people on earth slaughter a buffalo a *déva* dies in heaven. The statement as such is no more than an intriguing case of pious speculation; it has no effect whatsoever on ritual. But the close relation between *déva*, man, and buffalo also finds expression in myth. All three are associated symbolically with the moon, and in a few myths a *déva* appears in the shape of a buffalo (Van Baal 1971 p. 252).

From here it is only one step to the identification of the sacrificed buffalo with the deity. The point of interest is that this step is not taken, not by the Ngad'a, not by the Nuer, nor by any of the Indonesian and African cattle breeding peoples I know of. As I did not make special enquiries into this matter, it would be rash to say that it does not occur at all. The possibility lying so near at hand, it would be surprising if it did not do somewhere. Nevertheless, the probability of an identification of victim and deity is considerably smaller than it must seem in the light of theories such as those by Frazer or by Hubert and Mauss on the god-victim of the agrarian sacrifice. These sacrifices, symbolizing the death of the corn-mother or the revival of



the tree-spirit, derive from a radically different climate of religious thinking than the sacrifices associated with gift-exchange or with penalty and atonement. The proper content of the agrarian sacrifice is the re-enactment of the divine drama of death and resurrection, of life borne by death. The drama of the gods is the drama of nature as well as that of the main means of subsistence, the corn. It is also the drama of mankind. Re-enacting its major events the actors identify themselves with the gods like the Australian aborigines do when they repeat the deeds of their ancestors by having these dream-time beings personified by men who are held to be physically their reincarnations. They thus give shape to the mysterious intentions that are the hidden essence of visible reality, identifying themselves with them, and through them with that whole world of mysterious intentions that is the secret essence of their universe. Communication with that universe is realized by acts of identification with the ancestors, the incarnations of its mystery, by direct participation in the mythical events and divine deeds. It is a form of communication that differs fundamentally from the person-to-person type of communication through discourse or the exchange of gifts between man and his gods.

The sacrifice of the god-victim is an effort at communication through identification. In this climate of thinking the question arises whether the victim should not more properly be a man than a beast symbolizing the god. In Mexico a thoroughly pessimistic worldview inspired a violent realism that found its fulfilment in the most diverse forms of human sacrifice. To many historians of religion the barbarism of the New World forms of sacrifice held a corroborant of the veridity of the numerous accounts of comparable atrocities committed in the ancient civilizations of the Old World. I must raise a *caveat* here. Modern anthropological research suggests that the proper secret of many secret rituals is not the supposedly esoteric meaning of the ritual, but, contrariwise, the technique how to operationalize this esoteric meaning. A good case is that of the Marind-anim of South New Guinea (West-Irian). One section of the tribe periodically celebrated an initiation ritual called *ezam-uzum*, husband-wife. Before the beginning of the rites a contraption was constructed consisting of a long tree-trunk, resting on the ground with one end, and with the other at man's height on a simple scaffolding. Toward the end of the rites all the neophytes had to copulate one after another with a certain

girl lying on a mat under the elevated end of the trunk. While the last of the neophytes was doing his duty the scaffolding was suddenly torn down, and the trunk crashed the copulating pair who were roasted and eaten. Obviously, they personified *ezam* and *uzum*, and a more convincing case of eating the deity is hardly imaginable. Later research confirmed the truth of the construction of the elevated tree-trunk and also that at a certain moment the scaffolding was torn down, but not of the story of the copulating pair. All that was crashed were two coconuts, roughly decorated as a man's and a woman's head, and this did not even happen under the tree but a little way off. The story of the pair killed under the tree is the story told to the non-initiated. That it contains esoteric truth is confirmed by the more elaborate initiation rituals of the coastal divisions of the tribe. There, too, stories were told about a pair or a woman killed and eaten at the end of the rites. These stories were veritable myths giving significant information on the cosmological meaning of the rites. The non-initiated were allowed to know them, but not how the death of the deities concerned was operationalized by means of a perfectly innocent symbolism (cf. Van Baal 1966 pp. 540 f., Ch. X, XI).

There is ample reason to keep this in mind when studying ancient records of human sacrifice. These sacrifices might have occurred less frequently than these records suggest. But I shall not enter deeper into this. Instead, another question must be raised. Are we really justified to call these rituals sacrifices? If they go combined with an offering or a dedication to a deity, we certainly are, but not if this element is lacking and the ritual is confined to the re-enactment of a mythical drama. In that case we had better use a more appropriate term, either the one of drama, or the term once proposed by Jensen, that of killing ritual (1951). I have no preferences in this matter, but I do object against the use of the term sacrifice for rituals in which every element of the gift or of atonement is utterly absent. Giving is important, far more important than our theories thus far have been willing to recognize, erroneously substituting bribing for giving.

True giving is participating, participating in the life and work of the donee, participating in one's universe as a sympathizing member. No one can participate without giving first. Giving is essential for a meaningful existence. The simple food-offering set aside for the gods, the clumsy prayer before meals, and the give-and-take character-

istic of mutual care in the small group, are the most real and effective means of communication, cementing togetherness and confirming security. All communication begins with giving, offering.

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